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Analyzing Culturally Specific Approaches towards Women's Empowerment:
A Comparison of Two Community-Based Programs in Northern Ireland and Ecuador

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Presented to

The Graduate Program in College of Theology, Arts & Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of

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Abstract

Research conducted in this study examined women's empowerment through a comparison of case studies in Northern Ireland and Ecuador. The objective was to explore the approaches and effectiveness these programs have towards empowering women. A review of existing literature assisted the researcher in defining and conceptualizing *empowerment*, thereby creating a framework in which empowerment could occur. Past research indicated that empowerment groups throughout the world addressed such issues as economic, social, and gender equality. Through a comparative case study analysis of two community-based programs and the review of the literature, the researcher discusses the current progress and challenges of women's empowerment in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Quito, Ecuador.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, Ireland, Ecuador, cultural approaches towards empowerment

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
Background.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Research Questions.....	11
Methods.....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
Process of Empowerment.....	18
Understanding Disempowerment.....	18
Gender Equality.....	20
Personal Power.....	21
Types of Empowerment.....	23
Economic Empowerment.....	24
Social Empowerment.....	28
Holistic Empowerment.....	32
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	37
Design.....	37
Case Study One: Northern Ireland.....	38
Participants.....	43
Materials and Procedures.....	47
Case Study Two: Ecuador.....	49
Participants.....	51
Materials and Procedures	53
Ethical Considerations Safeguard's.....	58
Chapter 4: Results.....	59
Case Study One Data Evaluations.....	59
Case Study Two Data Evaluations.....	61
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	64
Analysis.....	68
Limitations.....	69
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	71
Recommendations	76
References.....	78
Appendix A.....	87
Appendix B.....	88
Appendix C.....	89

List of Abbreviations

CCCD: Child Centered Community Development

CONAMU: Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NI: Northern Ireland

NISRA: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

SEWA: Self Employed Women's Association

UNIFEM: United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific

WEMWBS: The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Within the past few decades, the international community has shifted its ideologies of women and gender roles, acknowledging the importance of empowering women and of gender equality. At the International Conference on Population and Development, development organizations discussed the necessary role women's empowerment plays in future development outcomes: "The empowerment and autonomy of women, and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status, constitute an important end in themselves and one that is essential for achieving sustainable development" (UNFPA, 1994, p. 263). The increased awareness of women's empowerment and gender equality has increased female participation in society, reduced gender inequality, and enhanced awareness of disempowerment.

In every culture, the process of women's empowerment has evolved differently, but the overall consensus is that addressing disempowerment can strengthen the livelihoods of women, decrease vulnerability, and assist in developing a sense of self-worth. Uplifting women, who make up 50% of the world's population, becomes an essential component for the emergence of new, creative, and cooperative global development solutions. (Sen & Grown, 1985). This realization shows that all genders and culture's benefit from empowering women.

Despite the widespread support for women's empowerment, there is limited research that empirically analyzes culturally specific approaches towards empowering women. Therefore, the researcher study conducted a comparative analysis of two cultures, specifically Quito, Ecuador and Belfast, Northern Ireland, to identify cultural

trends in women's empowerment. The considerable diversity of these two case studies will allowed the researcher to compare the progression and limitations of the programs in each country, and add to the existing research on women's empowerment. There is a clear link between cultural dynamics and women's empowerment, which is particular to each case study. The goal of this research was to provide information and suggestions for culturally specific women's empowerment groups; data from primary research and secondary resources enabled the researcher to articulate the cultural understanding of women's empowerment in Ecuador and Northern Ireland.

Background

Women's empowerment has become a primary goal of the development community, but many organizations have overlooked culturally specific characteristics regarding their target audience, which has caused empowerment programs to be generic and unspecialized. Although there is now an increased effort to define and evaluate empowerment, obstacles continue to deprive women access to organizations or program that suits their particular needs. Key factors, such as historical events, cultural traditions, and customs have been overlooked.

With many international agencies and organizations defining and measuring empowerment in different contexts, it is not clear what is accomplished by using the word empowerment. The common understanding is that empowerment is achieved through traditional development goals, such as improved health or economic status. For example, according to Malhotra (2000), it is not always clear whether authors who are using the terms such as "women's empowerment," "gender equality," "female autonomy," or "women's status" are referring to similar or different concepts (Malhotra,

2000, p. 6). The definition of women's empowerment has evolved into meaning different things. Despite the similar concepts underlying many of these terms, the idea of women's empowerment can be distinguished by four categories. Specifically, every definition includes one of the following:

- For a woman to be empowered, she must have been disempowered.
- A third party cannot grant empowerment; rather those who would be empowered must accept or claim their personal empowerment. Although many agencies or organizations want to award empowerment, they can only achieve this by facilitating information that enables women to empower themselves.
- There needs to be a sense of personal analysis and action. Women need to individually assess why empowerment is necessary or needed in their lives, which then enables them to take action.
- The final common factor of empowerment is that it is an ongoing process; no ultimate goal meets everyone's needs. Rather it is a journey that may or may not have setbacks. It should be noted that the term 'empowerment' has yet to be specifically defined and it may be assumed that based upon the context it is used, the term maybe interpreted situationally and contextually. However, in context of women, empowerment often refers to a feeling of awareness of one's own situation, which they support with knowledge, skills and information. All of these factors enable them to gain higher self-esteem and facilitate their role as decision makers in society. (Chakravarty et al, 2013, p. 155)

Recent efforts from the international community have emphasized the important leadership role women have in the world. In 2015, the United Nations held an international meeting called the Millennium Summit. At the Summit, The General Assembly, consisting of 189 member states, pledged to transform the world by 2030, through achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These Goals target three areas of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental (United Nations, 2015). While the goals covered a wide variety of issues, Goal 3 specifically sought out to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It aimed to end discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against all women and girls. Additionally, it targeted improving social protection policies, effective participation, equal opportunities, and universal access to health rights for all women and girls. The increased conversation about this topic demonstrates the importance in conducting culturally specific research for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Having the international community behind the movement of empowering women intensified the researcher's personal desire to study culturally specific approaches towards female empowerment. Notably, the researcher has identified and examined why certain populations and communities have been confronted with disempowerment. By observing different cultural attitudes towards women's empowerment, the successes, and failures of each attitude were uncovered. Finally, the researcher analyzed and compared the data from Northern Ireland and Ecuador to expose how different these case studies are not only geographically, but culturally.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has been a part of an ongoing ethnonational conflict, which has affected the identity and development of the culture, specifically affecting women because of traditional gender expectations (Grayzel 1999; Rooney 2002). In post-conflict Northern Ireland, there are high levels of segregation between Catholic and Protestant communities and a persistent presence of paramilitary/sectarian violence (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006). Specifically, the division is between unionist/loyalists, who are predominately Protestant and consider themselves British and the nationalist/republicans who are predominately Catholic, and consider themselves Irish. These populations have had to overcome complex religious, social and political issues. Additionally, traditional gender roles have continued to be present in Northern Ireland. The women in Belfast have been exposed to and a part of a post-conflict society, which left many economically and socially restricted. Analyzing the progression of gender specific empowerment in Belfast, Ireland is particularly interesting because of the limited attention women in post-conflict societies have received.

Ecuador

Ecuador has been the subject of political instability, environmental crisis, and economic and social challenges, which has affected women and their families in particular. Ecuadorian women have dealt with discrimination; first because they are female and second because of their ethnic and cultural origins. Diminishing these kinds of discrimination is a challenge the country faces (CONAMU, 2000). Also, women and girls have been affected by Ecuador's strong machismo culture and traditional indigenous influence, which has often left many women trapped in established gender roles and

customs. The machismo cultural ideology refers to “the cultural norm that men retain the right to subordinate women and women must hold their submissive role in society” (Luna et al., 2015, p. 18). A significant amount of Ecuadorian women, especially those living in rural communities, have suffered deprivations: "Inequality between men and women is still manifested in access to services, the labor market, and public life. Unemployment is great among women, and much of the work they do is poorly paid or unpaid" (UNDP, 2001, p. 11). The lack of resources available to Ecuadorian women makes this case study particularly interesting and adds dimension to the challenges that Ecuadorian women face.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to identify key factors contributing to disempowerment in Northern Ireland and Ecuador and to further understand how these issues have affected the women in both countries. The researcher assessed one organization in Ecuador and one organization in Northern Ireland to demonstrate cultural practices being used in their empowerment programs. Additionally, the researcher examined the correlations between Northern Ireland and Ecuador, promoting a higher achievement of women's empowerment in Belfast and Quito.

This type of research can bring awareness of the importance of culturally specific women's empowerment groups, which can make a difference in the lives of women and their families. Data-based conclusions about best practices and recommendations were presented to program facilitators; in hopes of enhancing individual and community knowledge of women's empowerment. Additionally, with an increased awareness of

conceptualization, community dynamics, and women's empowerment, programs in Northern Ireland and Ecuador can be restructured or newly established.

Upon completion, the researcher aimed to understand the discourse about women's empowerment in different cultural settings and to identify the underlying causes of disempowerment in each community. Furthermore, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each empowerment program contributed to recommendations for each organization. Data will prove that women's empowerment is culturally explicit and that every community or group has different needs.

Research Questions

The researcher conducted this research to analyze the culturally specific approaches towards women's empowerment in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Quito, Ecuador. More specifically, the researcher examined the methods and approaches Mornington Community Project (Northern Ireland), and Plan Ecuador (Ecuador) have taken to address women's disempowerment. Through this research, the research discovered the strengths and weaknesses of each organization and brought to light the importance of cultural awareness. The researcher also, highlighted the different geographic and cultural approaches towards empowering women.

The key questions guiding this research include the following:

- What has caused disempowerment in each case study?
- What are the culturally specific needs of the women in each case study?
- Are the organizations and its program(s) addressing the culturally specific needs of the women?
- What improvements are needed to achieve empowerment in each case study?

The researcher developed a conceptualization of culturally specific approaches towards women's empowerment in this study. The researcher identified different factors that have affected the women in Northern Ireland and Ecuador. In these case studies, indicators of disempowerment included cultural traditions, post-conflict, gender roles, and lack of resources.

Methods

Design

In this study, the researcher used qualitative data to develop an understanding of women's empowerment in different cultural settings. Qualitative methods were best suited for this research because the researcher gathered culturally specific information on each case study, where quantitative or numerical data would not answer specific questions regarding women's empowerment. Case studies of programs in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Quito, Ecuador were documented and analyzed. Additionally, an individual evaluation of each program will be assessed. Non-experimental research has been conducted on personal observation, field, and participatory research. A systematic review of literature was used in the primary part of the research, and secondary analysis was utilized for the second and final part.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected from the two case studies of empowerment programs were analyzed based on their approaches and outcomes. Each case study was analyzed regarding approaches and outcomes. Primary research is presented to supplement the existing literature to better understand how each one of these countries approaches empowerment.

Population/ Sampling Method

For the first case study, the population of interest was women currently located in Belfast, Northern Ireland. These participants were ages 18 and older and have attended a women's Nurturing Programme at Mornington Community Project. Mornington is a well-established organization delivering a broad range of services to those living on the lower Ormeau area in South Belfast. The organization is situated in a region of Belfast that has seen significant violence, deprivation, third generation unemployment, cultural diversity, and division.

The program that Mornington facilitates; aims to inspire and empower those who participate in an interactive group setting for 11 weeks. The emphasis of the program is to encourage and support oneself, as a means to long-term change. Two certified facilitators gently lead participants to create and develop a peer support system so that they have a support network to deal with the past, present or emerging issues. Primary research of the Nurturing Programme assisted in collecting data specific to women's empowerment in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The second case study focuses on women currently living in Quito, Ecuador. These participants were ages 18 and older and were affiliated with Plan International, specifically the regional office in Quito, Ecuador. Plan is an international organization that's primary focus is to advance children's rights and equality for all women and girls (Plan International, 2013). Plan recognizes that women and girls are lacking access to resources that would help them achieve long-term improvements in education, leadership skills, decision-making skills, and achieving personal ambitions. The organization has a significant international presence, and has set out: "to reach as many children and women

as possible, particularly those who are excluded or marginalized, with high-quality programmes that deliver long-lasting benefits" (Plan International, 2013, p. 5).

The researcher observed all of the empowerment programs that Plan Ecuador offers. The researcher had access to secondary data that Plan Ecuador facilitators documented and presented. There were also opportunities which enabled the researcher to personally observe community diagnostics and program facilitation. Through gathering this data, the researcher was able to produce a meaningful analysis, which will be used to provide a comparison between Case Study One and Case Study Two.

Ethical Considerations and Safeguards

All information used for this research was obtained from personal observation, secondary data, and a literature review. While the participants were not aware that they were research participants, which would be ethically questionable, they did receive a waiver that they signed, stating that data would be collected, which is a safeguard to this research. Each organization presented a waiver explaining the anonymity of their research (Appendix A). The researcher did not examine data at an individual level, but rather the group level. Therefore, there is no risk of emotional or physical harm through this investigation. All information and documentation used for this research is available to the public and does not place any one individual at risk.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The United Nations Decade for Women, which began in 1976, put women's issues on the world agenda for the first time (UNDP, 2013). One of the primary objectives of the Decade for Women was to identify key barriers of gender equality and bring women's issues to the forefront of discussions about development, peace, and security (O'Neil *et al*, 2014). Since 1976, the United Nations and other organizations, both domestic and international, have worked towards articulating issues specifically relevant to women. According to the UNDP (2013), the international community focused their attention on women because aid directed for women "was not having its expected positive impact." In practice, the progress of women's empowerment and gender equality was inconsistent. Thus, international development organizations sought to bring about change, where problems and inequalities existed for women. Therefore, the concept of empowering women became an international commitment.

The goal of the international community was to treat women's rights and gender equality as a human rights issue, so that it could serve as a catalyst for social change. The UNDP suggested that empowerment is the process through which social inequalities may be addressed and overcome (UNDP, 2013, p 9). However, the term empowerment has taken on several different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. According to Eyben and Napier-Moore (2010) "Women's empowerment' is a fuzzy concept that has been trending in the international development community for the past 20 years. The inconsistencies in defining empowerment are due to a mixture of old and new clichés and buzzwords, such as 'participation', 'power', 'equality', 'social justice.'"

The authors believed that the meaning of empowerment will conform to any audience that it's aiming to please. Not only does the lack of collaboration between international NGOs, feminist academics, and civil society activists add to the lack of clear definition, but it also constrains its effective action. Therefore, for purposes of this study, it was important to understand the conceptualization of empowerment, how it transpires, and the degrees of its existence in different cultural settings

Conceptualization

Most researchers agree that empowerment is a process that is about gaining power (Catteaneo & Chapman, 2010). Catteaneo and Chapman (2010) have defined empowerment as, "an iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal orientated toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal" (p.647). In other words, empowerment is a process that embodies a personal desire to improve oneself and one's life circumstances. Similarly, Batliwala (1994) conceptualized empowerment as "a spiral, changing consciousness, identifying area to target for change, planning strategies, an action for a change, and analyzing activities and outcomes" (p. 132). The author recognized that women must be active participants in the process of empowerment, thus enabling them to have control of the outcome.

Researchers also have expanded on the concept of choice and agency as a part of the empowerment process. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) defined empowerment as "a person's capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes" (p. 7). As a result, having the proper resources enables

a person to take control of their empowerment process. Furthermore, Alsop and Heinsohn also argued that "the extent or degree to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made)." The concept of *agency* refers to having control over assets, such as material, social, financial, or human, while the concept of *opportunity structures* refers to formal and informal institutions, such as: governing bodies, laws, and organizations (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). Thus, having access to both agency and opportunity structures enables a woman to have choices whether she wants to utilize them or not is dependent on her.

Many scholars and international organizations emphasized that personal control is an important part of the empowerment process. Kabeer (2000) explained that the achievement of empowerment involves a component of control, which is "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where the ability was previously denied to them" (p. 85). This conceptualization of empowerment embodies both the elements of control and choice, which have proven to be essential in achieving empowerment. Similarly, Dixon-Miller (1998) understood empowerment as a dynamic and comprehensive concept, which includes more than personal choice. Specifically, the author argues that: "Empowerment is both a group and an individual attribute; both a process (that of gaining power) and a condition (that of being empowered)" (Dixon-Miller, 1998, p. 64). Therefore, the process of empowerment is reliant on exercising power, which is a conscious effort to confront or overcome injustices.

Other scholars have presented empowerment as a multifaceted process. According to Charmes and Wieringa (2003), women's empowerment is a nonlinear process that

includes the following elements: awareness/consciousness, choice/alternatives, resources, voice, agency, and participation. It is important to acknowledge the diversity of the empowerment process. What may work for one person, may not work for another. The authors explained that "awareness usually comes first at the manifest level of power relations, where women's subordination is most clearly visible and felt" (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003, p. 425). The motivation to become empowered must first begin with becoming aware of what caused disempowerment, followed by understanding the emotions that have resulted from it. Then it becomes about gaining access to resources, which enables individuals to make the choice to improve circumstance, thus beginning the process of empowerment.

The Process of Empowerment

The process of empowerment is an interactive progression of various components. Many researchers believe that when an individual becomes aware of their disempowerment then they are able to begin the process. It is not a linear process every individual and community has different needs and goals, but ultimately they seek some kind of life improvement. Therefore, it is important to deconstruct the steps of empowerment, which need not necessarily be taken in the order presented.

Understanding Disempowerment

There is a common theme in the empowerment literature regarding the role of disempowerment. Specifically, without a clear vision of disempowerment, the process of empowerment cannot begin. According to Kabeer (2000), disempowerment is a result of social constraints, which include: "the norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men" (p.22). Additionally, disempowerment is

the "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choice" (Kabeer, 2000, p. 437). Many cultural challenges restrict women from gaining access to resources, which can create a roadblock on the journey to empowerment. Kabeer (2000) goes on to argue that resources include not only material but also human and social elements (p. 437). Additionally, The United Nations (2010) stated that the power relationship between men and women has limited the control women have over resources. Women who have been subjected to unequal power relations, lack resources and face disempowerment (United Nations, 2010). Therefore, social constraints and a lack of access to resources can be among the many factors that contribute to the disempowerment of women.

Overlooking the unique elements, that affect women like patriarchal influence and traditional gender roles in the household can be another contributing factor of disempowerment. According to Malhotra (2003), "the household and interfamilial relations are the central locus of women's disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups" (p.2). The efforts of empowering women must be aware of the possible effects that can occur at the household level. Women can be resistant to the process of empowerment because their partner or family members are unsupportive or uncomfortable with the shift in family dynamics. Malhotra (2003) also explained that "women are not just one group amongst several disempowered subsets of society (the poor, ethnic minorities, etc.); they are a crosscutting category of individuals that overlaps with all these groups" (p. 2). Consequently, women face a multitude of challenges, which makes the empowerment process more complicated.

Patterson (2003) stated that religion and tradition can be another factor of disempowerment. Certain expectations may prevent women from communicating their dissatisfaction; specifically these factors “severely limited the power of girls and young women - their societies' least powerful people - to articulate divergent opinions” (Patterson, 2003, p. 338). Without the ability to communicate to freely, women will continue to be repressed and unable to take charge of their empowerment process. Certain cultures contribute to the disempowerment of women because of cultural norms, traditions and values. Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1999) claimed that for women to define their own priorities often depends on “sacrificing the protection of hierarchal familial relationships” (p. 202). As long as a woman is interconnected with her culture and traditions, it is essential for her to have family and community support to begin the empowerment process.

Gender Equality

Many researchers have expressed that the process of women's empowerment is connected to gender equality; specifically, without one, the other cannot exist. Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002) defined gender equality as the equal representation of women and men. Both sexes should have equal access to resources, opportunity, and life choices. Furthermore, the authors explain "women and men [should] have equal opportunities to make choices about what gender equality means and work in partnership to achieve it" (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002, pg. 291). For the process of empowerment to be successful it is necessary to acknowledge that women and men are not the same, but have equal value and should be given equal treatment.

The Millennium Development Goals proposed that gender equality is a fundamental human right, which is necessary for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world (UNDP, 2016). Despite international efforts towards promoting gender equality, women continue to face gender discrimination and inequalities throughout the world (UNDP, 2016). Specifically, women face discrimination in the labor force, unequal access to economic resources, low levels of participation in decision-making, and gender violence (UNDP, 2016). Similarly, a study conducted by Rowlands (1995) demonstrated, "Women have always been a part of the development process, but that they have been invisible and under-represented because of structural inequalities in society" (p.104). Female participation has increased within the international community, but historically women have been socio-culturally positioned to be inferior to men. Demonstrating that gender equality is interlinked with women's empowerment because without it women are unable to exercise their full potential within society.

Personal Power

Many scholars believe the process of empowerment is motivated by personal choice and individual goals. Thus, women have to make the decision to be in control of their empowerment. According to Kroeker (1995), the psychological effects of individual empowerment include "increased feelings of value, self-efficacy and control" (p.52). These effects are attributed to individuals recognizing they have power and are capable of changing their life circumstances. Cattaneo & Chapman (2010) elaborated on Kroeker's (1995) concept by identifying self-efficacy as an essential component in the empowerment process because of the motivating effect it has on performance across situations and cultures that are in need of empowerment. Not only can self-efficacy

empower an individual, but it can also empower a community of people faced with the same challenges.

Other researchers have identified access to resources as a part of generating personal power. Specifically, without the means to create change there is no possibility of improving current situations. Bandura (2002) explained the link between personal empowerment and resources, stating “the opportunities, obstacles, and resources in one’s environment have obvious impact on one’s beliefs about what they can accomplish” (p. 72). As a result, having access to resources can enhance the feeling of being in control, which leads to personal power and starts the process of empowerment. Blumberg (2005) further discussed the connection of personal power and resource accessibility, stating that having control over resources can be the “magic potion for gender equality, development and empowerment” (p. 35). So, if a woman can obtain resources, previously unavailable to her, then she may improve her position in society.

On the other end of the spectrum, some researchers believe that resources have no impact on personal empowerment; rather it is about the existence of alternatives. Charmes and Wieringa (2003) explain if women are aware of their oppression, but have no feasible alternatives, they are more likely to become complacent and accepting of their circumstance. However, the authors stated that if women acknowledge their discontent in the situation, eventually it will motivate them; “Women’s capability to make meaningful decisions over critical areas of their lives depends to a large extent on the existence of alternative to arrangements about which they are unhappy” (Charmes & Wieringa, 2002, p. 425). Thus, women will take action and gain power over their current situation once they recognize that there are alternatives. When a woman is aware of her alternatives, she

is able to acquire agency. The authors defined agency as “meaningful and purposeful intervention, the construction of something new” (Charmes & Wieringa, 2002, p. 426). They further clarified the “something new” as fighting for something on a personal level, whether it be advocating for gender equality or gaining access to education (Charmes & Wieringa, 2002). The purpose of agency refers to a woman having the power to achieve anything she desires.

The process of empowerment can be ignited by a variety of factors, all of which are dependent on the individual. It is important to identify disempowerment, equality, and personal power as forms of the empowerment process. As long as a woman is ready to take charge of her process, she is well on her way to becoming empowered. Many researchers agree that empowerment can take multiple forms and often times are dependent on community, culture or traditions. Therefore, it is important to discuss different categories of empowerment, why they are relevant, and how they are accomplished.

Types of Empowerment

It is evident from the discussions above that various scholars, government bodies and organizations see empowerment as a process, which can manifest itself into many forms. According to Malhotra et al. (2002), "women's empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological". However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered" (p. 13). Therefore, we must uncover the sub-domains that are a part of women's empowerment. Specifically, there should be a clear understanding of how

empowerment manifests itself, which can range from economic progression to social interactions. Categorizing the types of empowerment is important, and the following section will identify three main forms of empowerment – economic, social, and holistic.

Economic Empowerment

The economic empowerment of women has received significant attention and is often cited as one of the most important ways to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, and improve the well-being of not only women, but also all of society. A 1999 report by United Nations ESCAP states the following:

Economic empowerment constitutes one of the fundamental building blocks in efforts towards the overall empowerment of women.

Participation in formal economic activities on terms and conditions which reflect the productive capacity of women, and their control over their own incomes, are some of the important dimensions of economic empowerment...Access to earned income improves women's position within the household substantially, gives them greater control over the distribution of such earnings and household resources, and generally improves their status and strength in society as well as their own self-esteem. The ability to earn income from outside and to engage in activities other than household-oriented ones can lead to significant social change in the long run. Where women are generally denied the ownership of property and control over assets, the ability to earn outside income can become an important instrument for the transformation of gender relations

and challenge many traditional modes of social and economic relations.

(UN, 1999, p. 12)

Research has shown that women who contribute financially to the family can improve their position within the household (Kabeer, 1997). Specifically, women who work outside of the household have an opportunity to generate income and interact in the public sphere with non-family members. The public sphere refers to working in a public domain, outside of the household, which allows women to gain independence and economic success that they would not have otherwise. Kabeer (2012) elaborated on the concept of financial contribution outside of the household explaining, "independent forms of paid work held out a greater promise of empowerment than work carried out entirely within the confines of the household" (p. 269). So, for economic empowerment to be successful, it must include some monetary contribution from an outside source and generate economic growth.

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), women's economic empowerment grants women "access to and control over the means to make a living on a sustainable and long-term basis, and receiving the material benefits of this access and control" (UNIFEM, 2016, p. 18). This explanation goes beyond short-term goals; it addresses the long-term benefits that economic stability can have on the process of women's empowerment. Not only is economic empowerment a powerful process for the individual, but it is also a major contributor to sustainable development (Baiswas, 2010). When people are deprived and oppressed they are not actively contributing to society. Hence, the employment and contribution of women can aid in international development.

Golla, Malhotra, Nanda, and Mehra (2011), described economic empowerment as "a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance financially and the power to make and act on economic decisions" (p. 43). Economically empowering women generates women's rights and achieves development goals, such as "economic growth, poverty reduction, health and welfare" (Golla et al., 2011, p. 43). Therefore, if a woman is in control of her income, she can take care of herself and becomes less dependent on others. Similarly, Tornqvist and Schmitz (2009) referenced women's economic empowerment as "the process, which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society" (p. 9). Women can achieve economic empowerment through having access to financial resources and opportunities, which reduces the gender gap and inequalities in the labor market (Tornqvist & Schmitz, 2009, p. 9). These arguments suggest that employment may contribute to empowerment because it allows women to participate in society and become less reliant on others. Providing economic stability can create the sense of independence and empowerment.

The OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality explains, women's participation and contribution to economic growth, as a form of empowerment because it allows them to recognize their value, respects their dignity and benefit from the distribution of growth (OECD, 2011). Therefore, when a woman has access to employment and begins to generate income, "she feels economically strong, independent and autonomous" (Kurukshetra, 2005, p. 192). According to Kurukshetra (2005) economic development is a powerful instrument for women's empowerment because employment creates a sense of security and self-reliance, which was previously controlled by another person.

According to Self Employed Women's Association (SWEA) the concept of economically empowering women began a movement known as micro finance, which is a "powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy" (1997, p. 21) This discourse of empowerment focuses on alleviating poverty by supplying women with monetary means, which they hope will generate motivation to create some kind of social enterprise. The belief is that providing women with some sort of welfare will empower them and better their circumstances. However, Berglund (2007) believes that the social ramifications of microfinance are much greater than its benefits. Specifically, some cultures view women's economic liberalization as demeaning and defying cultural norms, which could lead to disempowerment rather than empowerment. Berglund recognizes the importance of honoring woman's needs rather than generalizing all poor and vulnerable populations.

Another common argument about women's empowerment is that providing women with financial means will enable them to have control over a resource that has traditionally been male-dominated. Researchers continuously address economics as an essential element of empowerment because women are often denied ownership over family assets. According to UNESCAP (1999), since women are unable to attain the means for individual assets, "the ability to earn outside income can become an important instrument for the transformation of gender relations and challenge many traditional modes of social and economic relations" (p. 20). Not only does economic empowerment address the needs of the women, but it also generates conversation about traditional gender roles.

However, other studies find that women's employment is often survival-driven and does not alter gender relations. Pearson (2004) and Baruah (2005) explained that women's low earnings do not offer them entitlements to social protection. Employment does not relieve the burden of domestic labor, it does not increase political participation, and it does not lead to equal property rights. For that reason, being employed may not be enough to ensure women's empowerment because working does not necessarily challenge gender relations or power structures in society.

Social Empowerment

The socio-demographic background could impact empowerment both directly, but also indirectly in its relation to education, social status and shifts in gender norms. Therefore, researchers have identified social empowerment as another necessary form of women's empowerment. Mandal (2013) defined social empowerment as "the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures" (p. 19). When social conditions restrict a woman from accessing resources, it can create situations of powerlessness. Social empowerment can address discriminations that women face in society and it is a process that promotes control in their lives, their communities, and society (Mandal, 2013). Being empowered on the social sphere means "enjoyment of equal rights, equal status and freedoms of self-development" (Mandal, 2013, p. 22). When a woman is socially empowered, she has the resources, opportunity and freedom to fully develop herself.

Another form of social empowerment is having access to higher education, which increases personal development and contribution to society. According to Swami, having access to higher education is an instrument of personal growth, "it helps in growing an

individual's intellectual horizons, wellbeing and potential for empowerment" (2012, p. 25). Giving women the opportunity to educate themselves can broaden their knowledge, both intellectually and socially. Not only does education help on an intellectual level, but also on a holistic level, "Education creates self-confidence, self-esteem, self-sufficiency to a person" (Swami, 2012, p. 25).

Further research acknowledges education as one of the single most important instruments of sociopolitical and economic transformation because it challenges social and cultural traditions; specifically it "removes all kinds of bigotry, narrowness, superstition and enhances fellow-feeling, tolerance etc." (Mandal, 2013, p. 24). Education encourages a woman to see life from a different perspective, beyond her cultural norms and traditions. It gives her the power to take charge of her life, instead of being restricted by outside forces. Mandal's (2013) discussed empowerment as freedom from deprivation, equal access to knowledge and information. When a woman is granted access to education, it increases her knowledge and intelligence, which allows her to gain independence and personal power. Castellani (2014) elaborated on Mandal (2013) concept of education being a form of social empowerment, describing education as an entry to greater opportunities. Not only does education provide immediate benefits, but it also provides societal benefits, which is the most important path to sustainable development. Women who are educated are likely to have greater economic opportunity, gain self-confidence, and overall have a better sense of wellbeing (Castellani, 2014).

Gaining independence and personal power can support women's active participation in society. Researchers state that the political process helps shape, share and exercise power. Therefore, another category of social empowerment is women's

involvement in the political sphere. According to Manohar (2001), the key to empowerment is recognition and enforcement of women's human rights, "without the establishment of women's legal rights and human social order women's real empowerment will be a distant dream" (p. 652). When women actively contribute in society, such as engaging in the political process, it helps uncover traditional social norms and discrimination that have affected women for centuries.

According to Burns et al. (2001), women's participation in politics is influential in society regardless of the degree of involvement: "By political participation we refer simply to activity that has the interest or effect of influencing government action – either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (p. 86). Burns et al. explain that the pure act of being involved in politics can make a difference in not only the woman's life, but also in society.

Rajput (2001) addressed the importance of women being active in the political sphere because it is necessary for personal advancement and gender equality in society. The author further explains that without women's participation in politics "it would be very difficult for a woman to increase effectiveness, capacity, challenging the existing power structures and patriarchal ideology" (Rajput, 2001, p. 22). For that reason, women's political empowerment decentralizes traditional gender power relations and encourages women's liberation in society. Through political participation, women have the opportunity to change or influence public decisions and address issues that are relevant to specific gender needs.

Some researchers argue that without addressing fundamental power relations, women's participation in politics may be challenging. Tiwari (2001) noted that the liberation of women in society depends on specific measures, "...primarily focus attention on rejecting all restrictions, controls, limitations, values, etc., on the ground that these are imposed on women only by patriarchy and are the revelation of male dominance" (p. 22). Consequently, women must overcome obstacles and challenges brought on by a male-dominated society. Chandra (1997) believes that redistributing power can challenge patriarchal ideologies, which encourages the process of empowerment. It is important to recognize that social opportunity and freedom for women are dependent on the equal status of men and women.

Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1999) reported that poor and marginalized people are often dependent on relationships of patronage rather than solidarity to ensure their survival. For women, claiming autonomy and defining their priorities is often dependent on "sacrificing the protection of hierarchical familial relationships" (Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1999, p. 202). Familial relationships can often be a barrier for women's empowerment. Paterson (2008) explained that engaging relatives and community members in the empowerment process can break the stigma women's empowerment often has. The author believes working with families and key members of the community can help generate awareness and ultimately support for female empowerment (Paterson, 2008, p. 340).

Berglund discussed the concept of self-help groups as another form of social empowerment. Specifically, these groups allow women to go beyond the confines of her household, which increases her interaction with others and creates a larger support

system. The researcher described this support system as: “The social network, created when the women meet up, has the potential to spread vital information to many families about disasters, market opportunities and political concerns” (Berglund, 2007, p. 17). This can give a woman the opportunity to relate others who are in similar circumstances. For that reason, the interaction within the self-help-group can become a resource to gain knowledge, income or moral support. Having a supportive community can motivate a woman to improve herself and create positive changes in all aspects of her life.

Additionally, some researchers believe that women's social empowerment has nothing to do with reshaping the ideologies of others, rather “women's empowerment, in reality, is to empower herself and not overpower familial relationships” (Kapur, 2001, p. 646). Ultimately, the focus should be on the individual and their personal process. Ramesh (2003) has a similar outlook on empowerment stating “the empowerment of women concerns women gaining control and power over their own lives” (p. 210). It is about personal empowerment, developing self-awareness, and possessing a sense of agency. Ultimately, empowerment is about a woman gaining control and power over her life (Ramesh, 2003). She stated that disempowerment can be a consequence of social factors, such as patriarchal influences, lack of education and political misrepresentation, the process of empowerment can only begin when the individual seeking empowerment takes action for the issue(s) they define as important (Ramesh, 2003).

Holistic Empowerment

When the need for belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization are not met, one can feel inferior, weak, helpless, and worthless. A holistic approach towards empowerment addresses all aspects of individual growth. The term holistic refers to

mental, spiritual and physical well-being that positively impact health and create stability (Ray, 2016). Many see the holistic model as a means for self-reflection, intentional choice, and focused action. According to Ray (2016), without nurturing oneself, the process of empowerment cannot begin. Holistic empowerment can address personal development skills, which can “provide self-confidence, the sense of self-respect and self-worth for the adolescent girls and women” (Ray, 2016, p. 32). Without inner self-awareness, a woman is unable to develop and strengthen herself.

Paterson (2008) believes that developing a sense of self and managing one's emotions, through personal reflection, can encourage women to “reflect on their personalities, to clarify their aspirations, and to understand how they relate to others” (p. 336). Therefore, when a woman begins the process of empowerment from within, she can increase self-awareness and generate action towards self-improvement. For the process of holistic empowerment to begin it must involve “learning about one's self from many perspectives, and learning to harness one's rational and emotional resources to achieve desired ends” (Paterson, 2008, p. 336). Increasing personal awareness and managing emotions rather than repressing feelings can actively stimulate change. Furthermore, the author addressed the importance of women advocating for their personal empowerment: “Encouraging women to take action and exercise their agency, then to reflect on and share the experience with other women, is a common dimension of women's empowerment” (Paterson, 2008, p. 342).

Similarly, Dhaka (2014) has noted that the key to holistic empowerment is boosting the morale and self-confidence of women, which eliminates the inferiority complex women have towards patriarchal influences. The author explained that male-

dominated societies are one of the many barriers that women's empowerment confronts. A woman that lives in a patriarchal society is less assertive, which "destroys her confidence as she feels less important in the family as well as in society" (Dhaka, 2014, p. 634). Living in a male-dominate community can affect a woman's self-esteem and self-confidence, which can make it difficult to challenge external barriers, like patriarchal influences. Therefore, holistic well-being is a major determinant of empowerment because it encourages a woman to breakdown traditional gender norms or cultural barriers, increasing her freedom, and opportunities in life.

Mandal (2013) believes that holistic empowerment is intertwined with emotional empowerment. Specifically, social involvement can have positive psychological benefits through encouraging a woman to recognize her self-worth. Participating in any type of institution, whether it's educational, political or some kind of decision-making body can help her take control of her destiny. Simply, being a part of something that is beyond household work can award "them opportunities to see and to know more of the world" (Mandal, 2013, p. 21). Therefore, personal growth and exploration can manifest into self-respect, pride, maturity, and resilience. Mandal explained that increased mental strength can guide a woman towards living a more fulfilled life (2013). Specifically, being involved in something beyond traditional obligations can give her "satisfaction in various ways relating to work, living, learning, and adjusting in personal and financial situations." (Mandal, 2013, p. 24). Thus, holistic empowerment can occur when a woman is participating in any social institution because it aids in psychological development.

According to Jeyarathnam and Kamalaveni (2013), psychological empowerment develops when there is a strong desire towards personal achievement. Those who seek

this form of empowerment must embody “strong will power, achievement motivation, strong determination and assertive nature” (Jeyarathnam & Kamalaveni, 2013, p. 43).

Women who have the ability to overcome insecurities and feelings of helplessness can develop a strong sense of self-respect. Furthermore, the authors asserted that psychological empowerment is challenging in patriarchic societies because of cultural norms, gender inequalities, and an absence of resources. Psychological empowerment cannot develop without redistributing power within families and communities. However, Chan (2001) argued that psychological empowerment is not about a redistribution of power rather it is about focusing on inner strengths, which guides an individual to better cope with their life circumstances. An awareness of “inner resources,” allows a person to identify their abilities and lessen their reliance on others (p. 185). No matter the family dynamics or cultural norms, if a woman is emotionally confident to challenge traditions, she will be capable of change.

According to Tengland (2006), the overall health and wellbeing of an individual is a part of holistic empowerment because it promotes a positive quality of life. The researcher described “a positive quality of life” as a life involves feeling well and fulfilling all personal desires. Increasing or maintaining health, enables a person to feel “physically and mentally well” (Tengland, 2006, p.198). Therefore, the healthier a person feels, the more likely they will utilize internal and external desires. Internal desires can include: autonomy, knowledge, and emotional wellbeing, and external desires can include; safety, education, and accessibility to resources. Thus, this approach towards empowerment can occur when an individual can control or change things in her environment that affect her health-related quality of life.

Holistic empowerment consists of a number of different core aspects that interact in a way that helps individuals to gain better control over their lives. Many researchers view internal wellbeing as a core construct of empowerment (Chan, 2001). When women believe that they have the ability to make strategic life choices, they gain confidence and begin transforming their lives.

It is important to understand that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that involves many factors. These factors can be affected by one's social and political history, culture and customs, and traditions. Therefore, opportunities for empowerment are particular to each group, country, and region. Investing time in understanding how different groups of women react to the process of empowerment can reinforce the potential for success. Progress is not linear, guaranteed or free from setbacks. However, progress on women's empowerment can be, and has been, made in most countries around the world. (O'Neil et al, 2014).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

After careful consideration of what would be the best approach for collecting data on women's empowerment, the researcher decided to inquire directly with two organizations in two different countries. The design of this study involved observations of both the facilitators and the participants in each case study to better understand the process of promoting empowerment and becoming empowered. The first case study had 12 participants and two facilitators, all females affiliated with Mornington Community Project, who live in South Belfast, Northern Ireland. The second case study involved programs facilitated by Plan International in Quito, Ecuador. The primary program of interest took place in a rural community of Atucucho in Quito, Ecuador. There were approximately 29 female and two male participants, and four Plan International facilitators involved with this program.

The goal in gathering these data was to make a variety of recommendations that could improve each organization's approach towards empowerment. The researcher does understand that she was an outsider looking in, making it critical to examine history, culture, and background of the organizations. Gathering this information guided the researcher to better understand each organization's approach towards achieving women's empowerment.

Design

The research was done through qualitative, semi-structured interviews and data analysis from each organization to assess their approaches towards women's empowerment. A qualitative study was chosen in order to explore the unique empowerment approaches presented by each organization. Qualitative measures captured

the relational, subjective, and process elements of empowerment. Analyzing this type of data provided insight into discussions or observations of women in natural settings, which guided the researcher to determine whether her findings qualify as women's empowerment and as influencing their life decisions. This specific research style enabled the researcher to observe and appreciate the complexity of each case study. Also, the researcher utilized secondary data provided by each organization, which enabled her to develop a well-rounded understanding of the empowerment programs in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Quito, Ecuador.

Case Study One: Northern Ireland

This research aims to examine Belfast, Northern Ireland's women's empowerment Programme that is facilitated by Mornington Community Project in order to analyze its strengths and weaknesses. The proposed research will not only contribute to a better understanding of the cultural approaches towards women's empowerment specific to Belfast, Northern Ireland, but it could also help guide other organizations to implement similar empowerment groups. Finding limitations of the empowerment program is worthwhile as it indicates areas in which the program can be improved. This research is important in understanding the culturally specific approach towards women's empowerment in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Also, it helps show which approaches towards empowerment are successful in a post-conflict society such as Northern Ireland.

Without an explanation of the historical events that have taken place in this country, it will be difficult for the reader to truly understand what has shaped the women of Northern Ireland. A common discussion about the conflict in Northern Ireland, also known as the Troubles, is that was a "man's war, with women on the sidelines" (Rooney,

2002, p. 28). This conflict was the division between unionist/loyalist, who were predominately Protestant, considered themselves British, and wished to maintain the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and the nationalist/republicans who were predominately Catholic, considered themselves Irish and wished to unify Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Stapleton & Wilson, 2014). From 1968 to 1998, the 'Troubles' affected many, causing approximately 3,700 deaths (Holloway, 2005) and leaving many vulnerable and susceptible to paramilitary/sectarian violence.

In 1998, the violence diminished dramatically with the established of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. According to Herbert (2014) this peace agreement pledged to provide political, economic, and social equality and inclusion for all Northern Ireland. However, despite the promises of inclusion and equality established in the final document, the implementation of the Agreement left many with the same feeling of exclusion and perpetuated gendered stereotypes. Women's empowerment in post-conflict societies, like Northern Ireland, has received limited attention possibly because it is at odds with the patriarchal dominance of (para)militarism. During the 'Troubles' traditional gender stereotypes framed men as protectors and fighters, and women as vulnerable and needing protection (Herbert, 2014).

Apart from traditional gender roles, such as providing support to the war effort, strengthening morale, and producing healthy offspring, women's actions were less visible and often underrepresented to observers (Grayzel, 1999; Rooney, 2002). Women were frequently seen as victims of conflict, as peacemakers or as supporting players (Stapleton & Wilson, 2014). The case of Northern Ireland is significant because post-conflict society left many people, especially women, disempowered and without resources for self-

improvement. The effects of conflict have dramatically challenged family and community dynamics; many men were injured, killed or imprisoned, which led to an increase in female-headed households (Anderlini, 2006). Consequently, numerous women living in Northern Ireland are experiencing third generation unemployment, low-level education, and living in single-parent homes. This deprivation is particularly significant in the communities of Belfast. Specifically, in working class neighborhoods like South Belfast, social and economic deprivation continues to be the norm.

In South Belfast, the Lower Ormeau is a small isolated and vulnerable community that was an exclusively Protestant area until the 1950s when the first Catholic residents began to move in. Gradually, Protestants chose to move out of the area as new housing and improved living conditions enticed them towards middle-class neighborhoods. A steady stream of young Catholics took up residence in the recently vacated houses; this changed the social demographics of the Ormeau Road. Today, the Road is divided into Lower and Upper: the Lower has a detectable Catholic Nationalist community, and the Upper has a significant population of Loyalist Protestants. Many in the Lower Ormeau neighborhood have become a product of the identity conflict and continue to deal with segregation within Belfast.

The Ormeau Road stretches for miles, but the divide becomes apparent when crossing the River Lagan. To one side of the River, there is a working class community, third generation unemployment, and single-parent households. According to a report conducted by the NISRA 2010, the Lower Ormeau community in South Belfast is an area of the multiple deprivations. Specifically, its residents are at the top 2% of Northern

Ireland's most disadvantaged – with about 44.2% of households classified as living in relative poverty and 51.5% of the population is economically inactive (NISRA, 2010).

The streets in the Lower Ormeau are littered with trash, walls marked with graffiti, and many people are withdrawn and guarded. However, the Upper Ormeau has become gentrified with trendy restaurants and bars, old money and new money are housed in beautiful bricklayer homes, and the air almost feels more crisp and clean. Residents from both sides of the Road, make it a point to specify which part of the Ormeau they reside in. However, in the past, the entire area of South Belfast was a highly vulnerable and deprived.

Numerous civil society and grassroots organizations have been working to bring communities together, and to increasing community morale. Thirty years ago, two local organizations, a Nationalist Women's group, and an Evangelical Protestant Church founded Mornington Community Project. Mornington Community Project has dedicated their mission to bringing residents together in a safe shared space, free of judgment and hostility. In this post conflict Belfast, it is important to create a shared society, challenging all forms of racism and sectarianism and increasing dialogue between divided groups. Ultimately, the purpose of Mornington was to empower the community. They have firmly established themselves as a vital resource– one resident said: "It is like a big oak tree in the community – there through thick and thin, and no matter whom you were, you were made welcome" (Mornington Community Project, 2014). A part of Mornington's mission is to provide a place where all people have a sense of belonging, regardless of their ethnicity, religious or political views.

With the changing times, Mornington recognized the need for improvements, both aesthetically and holistically. For that reason, the organization went through a complete remodel, hoping to re-engage residents and to address the current requirements of the community. Although the effects of conflict are still very much present in the Lower Ormeau community, they have manifested into different issues. A place that was once a war zone, full of scared and angry people, is now a neighborhood filled with broken and lost individuals who seek purpose and direction. Mornington aims to guide and support those who have lost themselves in post-conflict Northern Ireland. Their aim is to help all residents of South Belfast in articulating their needs, building trust, strengthening people's resilience in difficult times, and building bridges within and between communities.

Mornington Community Project dedicates their time to developing and supporting the residents of South Belfast. They believe that building confidence within the community and creating a strong, resilient and peaceful neighborhood will bring forth change. It is about providing people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to affect positive change within their communities (Morning Community Project, 2014). Community transformation can only take place if barriers are broken down, which encourages people to come together and improve their quality of life (Rural Community Network, 2014). Mornington began developing and implementing programs into their organization that empower individuals and groups to find solutions and approaches to their challenges. Specifically, they address current issues, like equality and anti-discrimination, social justice, and women's disempowered.

Participants

This study involved a close examination of the Nurturing Programme and its participants. The Nurturing Programme is a newly implemented women's empowerment group at Mornington Community Project. The organization realized the need for such a group in South Belfast because women historically have struggled to find a voice in post-conflict Northern Ireland. For that reason, the purpose of the Nurturing Programme is to instill confidence amongst women to define themselves, their priorities, and their agendas for action. Before launching this Programme, a community assessment was conducted by Mornington staff and volunteers. They wanted to determine the best approach towards empowering women in this area. Their process was sympathetic to the social, demographic, economic, and political circumstances of South Belfast residents. Mornington realized that this was not a linear process; rather it needed flexibility to adapt to changing conditions.

Mornington's first approach towards women's empowerment was an 8-week pilot program called Looking After Me, which was a holistic health and wellbeing program that addressed issues relating to low self-esteem. It aimed to build confidence, improve emotional health, wellbeing and resilience through group discussions and practical self-help techniques. Mornington staff was optimistic that self-esteem and self-confidence could develop during these weekly group meetings, but the group leaders soon realized that participants were unresponsive to this approach. The women of the Lower Ormeau community were disengaged and uncomfortable with the concept that Looking After Me Programme presented because self-reflection and self-acceptance were completely foreign to them. Culturally, Northern Irish people, especially women, are unaccustomed

to this type of self-expression; it is viewed as silly or childish. This realization challenged Mornington facilitators. They recognized the need for empowering women, but they needed to find a different approach. They needed to find a way to deliver the message of self-improvement without scaring off their target audience.

The second approach towards women's empowerment began with Mornington staff gathering information on their current demographic, which included: single mothers, ages 20 to 40, who were unemployed and largely reliant on government funding. Rather than focusing on the negative life circumstances that these women faced, they chose to concentrate on the positive and shared characteristic; the commonality between the women was that all of them were mothers. This realization guided Mornington staff to establish the Nurturing Programme. The Programme addresses parents' ability to handle life's stresses affecting them in their everyday lives by teaching them practical tools, such as self-reflection and positive coping mechanisms. Rather than solely focusing on personal wellbeing, it emphasizes on developing awareness and appreciation of physical, mental, and emotional well-being for the entire family. Mornington Community Project believes that the long-term outcome of the Nurturing Programme is improved resilience, increased self-esteem of the entire family, and positive parenting. Developing parent's confidence encourages them to not only engage with their children, but also with other parents and people of the community.

Mornington was the first non-profit organization in Belfast to establish a program that focuses on self-esteem and positive parenting. The Nurturing Programme represented a new direction for community work in Northern Ireland, specifically with South Belfast residents. Since this was the first program of its kind in Belfast that encouraged holistic

empowerment it was important to track the progress through surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. To have a better understanding of what, why, and how the Nurturing

Programme was formatted, examples of the weekly topics include:

1. Building Blocks: the Four Constructs
2. Praise and Criticism
3. Family Rules, Rewards, and Penalties
4. Personal Power
5. Feelings and What We Do With Them
6. Kinds of Touch
7. Ages and Stages in Children's Development, Helping Children Grow Up
8. Issues around Sex and Helping Children Stay Safe
9. Problem-solving and negotiating
10. Continuing the Family Journey
11. Connecting the Dots.

(Hunt & Mountford, 2003, p. 5)

The pilot program began in January 2016 and consisted of weekly, three-hour group meetings, for a total of 11-weeks. Mornington was able to employ dedicated staff who became certified as group facilitators. The role of facilitators, also known as the Parent Group Leader's is to deliver gentle, reflective, non-judgmental facilitation, which gives parents a safe space to test out new ideas and develop practical parenting tools. The Programme began with 12 participants, and over the span of 11-weeks, two of those participants decided to withdraw from the Programme. One participant was dealing with personal issues and the other became disengaged, ultimately deciding not to continue

with the group. Throughout this time the researcher was able to actively participate in the group sessions, which enabled her to fully immerse herself in the Lower Ormeau community. Although the principal focus of the program was to improve parenting skills, it was clear that the underlying message of self-esteem and self-improvement were subtly delivered. The concepts of personal power, self-esteem, and choices and consequences were introduced throughout the course of the program. Specially, personal power was described as one's emotional strength rather than physical strength, and self-esteem was defined as the way one feels about themselves. The facilitators explained that a person is likely to use their personal power to make good choices if they have healthy self-esteem, which means having a positive, realistic, and resilient outlook on life.

This Programme was designed to provide guidance to parents and/or guardians. During each session participants were given different activities to help them learn and engage with one another in a variety of ways. Some activities were completed individually and some of the activities were done as a group. Every session began with a reminder of ideas from previous sessions, and then transitioned into the key message for a major new topic. Following the introduction of the new topic was, the "have a go" activity, and then the "stop and think" activity, and finally, questions and comments from the group. The Nurturing Programme aimed to accommodate all learning styles, personalities, and level of engagement (Hunt and Mountford, 2003). The Programme recognized that family life can be chaotic, so there was flexibility in the structure of the 11-week group. Originally, the course was designed to have 10 weekly meetings, but Mornington added an extra week to provide some flexibility. Thus, the purpose of the

group was about providing the participants the space to gain knowledge, establish a support system and encourage parents to get the best out of family life.

Materials and Procedures

At the beginning and end of the programme, each participant received a disclaimer for the data that were documented during the 11-week program (Appendix A), and then they received and filled out The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Appendix B) and a First Session Questionnaire (Appendix C). The WEMWBS is a 14-item scale with five response categories that measures an individual's state of mental well-being (i.e., thoughts and feelings). It was developed to assist the monitoring of mental well-being in the general population and the evaluation of programs, project, and policies that aim to improve mental well-being (Stewart-Brown, 2015). For purposes of the Nurturing Programme, facilitators used WEMWBS to measure the progress of each participant from the beginning to the end of the 11-week programme. Session Questionnaire focused strictly on each participant's child/children's strengths and difficulties. The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide the Parent Group Leaders with the specific needs of each parent and their child and/or children's behavior.

The staff at Mornington utilized the WEMWBS data to gauge whether the Nurturing Programme had a positive impact on the participants. The score was obtained by summing the 14 sections, which then determined (1) the state of happiness and life satisfaction and (2) positive psychological function, good relationships with others and self-realization/acceptance (Stewart-Brown, 2015). Before participants began using WEMWBS, facilitators clarified what exactly was being measured; the aims and

objectives of collecting the data, and the structure for collecting, recording, and managing the data. Once participants understood what the scale and Nurturing Programme aimed to achieve, they proceeded with filling out the scale. Below is an example of the First Session Questionnaire and WEMWBS.

After the data were collected, facilitators were able to measure the impact the Nurturing Programme had on participants. Below is an example of how WEMWBS is measured:

Some questions to think about when understanding your results:

- Do average WEMWBS scores increase from the Programme start to the finish?
- Is the change maintained at the follow up? Does it increase? Decrease?
- How big are the differences between baseline and follow up? How many participants were not able to be followed up? This can affect the results.
- Are there differences between different age groups? Why might this be, given the nature of the project?
- What else (besides the Programme) might have influenced WEMWBS scores?

Following the collection of these data, the participants were given a copy of the Family Links Nurturing Programme Parenting Guide, which is an interactive book that participants utilized during the group courses and at home with their families. During the first session, participants were encouraged to skim through the book while Parent Group Leaders delivered a short orientation about the course. The first session also enabled the participants to introduce themselves to one another and to establish a schedule that worked best for everyone. Although the Parent Group Leaders facilitated the sessions, the

participants were encouraged to take ownership of the entire process; ultimately, the course was about what best benefits the participants and their specific needs.

To process and analyze the data collected, the researcher compared the information given in the beginning and end of each case study. For Case Study One, Northern Ireland, the data collected from the 11-week Nurturing Programme included: the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Appendix B) and a First Session Questionnaire (Appendix C), were analyzed. The researcher looked for improvements and setbacks by comparing the information provided at the beginning and the end of the programme. Also, followed up with participants to see whether they had incorporated the Nurturing Programme tools into their everyday lives.

Case Study Two: Ecuador

Ecuador is an ecologically and culturally diverse country in the northwestern region of South America. It consists of four distinct regions: La Sierra (highlands including the Andes Mountain Range), El Oriente (Amazon Basin), La Costa (coastal region), and the Galapagos Islands (Duffy et al., 2012). Since it is a country rich in biodiversity, their economy is heavily reliant on its natural resources, tourism revenue, and agricultural products (World Bank, 2015). However, with a population of 16.1 million as of 2015, Ecuador's high poverty rates threaten the sustainability of its resources (Larrea et al., 2005). In addition to high poverty rates, the country has undergone a series of devastating crises, such as political instability, debilitating natural disasters, and the impairment of exercising free human rights (CONAMU, 2004). Women and their families are the ones being affected by these crises the most.

Women in Ecuador experience restriction in varying degrees. As a result, in 1997 the National Council for Women was established to guarantee, implement, and require recognition of women's rights, in policies with a gendered perspective (Garces et al., 2000, p.37). Also, the institutional status of gender issues in Ecuador was incorporated into the 1998 Constitution, which vowed to have an inclusive and nondiscriminatory society, with equal opportunities for all (Garces et al., 2000). This document is a valuable instrument for justice and empowerment of women. According to the United Nations (2004), the Constitution established fundamental principles, such as non-discrimination and equal protection of the law, the right to personal integrity and a life free from violence. Additionally, it promised freedom to decide "one's sexual life; the right to receive information and education on sexuality; the right to decide when and how many children to procreate; equal rights and opportunities for women and men to access and determine productive and ownership resources" (UN, 2004, p. 4). Although in some areas of Ecuador, particularly in larger cities like Quito, women appear to become more involved in the social and political sector, the advancement in rural areas like Andean and Amazonian regions continue to linger.

Despite increased awareness for gender equality, women continue to face discrimination in their daily lives. Women struggle with such things as: gaining access to basic social services and equal, equal pay, participating in decision-making, violence at home, and harassment at school (CONAMU, 2004). Additionally, the male-dominated culture of Ecuador has depreciated women's voices and influenced their decision-making process. Studies show that women are less likely to seek work outside of the home because of machismo cultural norms; 58% of women aged 15-64 participate in the labor

force, compared to 83% men of the same age range (World Bank, 2014; Duffy et al., 2012). This male-dominated culture explains why many women feel inferior to men and why they continue to be subjected to gendered stereotypes.

Being that Ecuador is a mixture of Indigenous, English, and Latin ethnicities, women not only fall victim to a dominant machismo culture, but they also face ethnic and cultural discrimination. According to the Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres (CONAMU), many Mestizo, Andean, and Amazonian women, "experience varying degrees of discrimination (with Mestizo women typically suffering the most discrimination), which in turns affects the engagement of women in resource decision making" (2004, p. 14). Many Ecuadorian's identify as being Mestizo (a mixture of Spaniard and Indigenous decent), which challenges the progression of gender and cultural equality in the country.

To combat disempowerment in Ecuador, culture and ideologies, historical context, poverty and the natural environment need to be taken into account. Recognizing that gender and cultural equality is a challenging feat, prompted several local organizations positioned gender issues at the forefront of their work. One such organization committed to challenging the root causes of gender inequality and exclusion is Plan International. Specifically, Plan International incorporates and promotes gendered perspectives and inclusion into their programs, plans, and projects. Their objective is to strengthen vulnerable communities by providing access to a variety of resources and trainings.

Participants

For this study, the researcher used data collected from Plan International (Ecuador), a non-profit organization committed to educating, protecting, and empowering

women and children. This case study was comprised of reviewing documents and data, consultations with Plan Ecuador staff, and personal observations. The researcher explored current external and internal programs, how they were executed, and how they were measured. In addition, the researcher was able to observe a community diagnostic that took place in one of the vulnerable communities in Quito. During this observation, the researcher was actively engaging with the community, 35 participants whose ages ranged from 20-50, which comprised of 29 women and four men. The diagnostic took place in a community center that also acts as a grade school and bakery for its residents. The participants lived on the outskirts of Quito, on a steep mountain-side in a village named Atucucho. Access to and from the village was difficult and few residents had access to a vehicle. Many used public transportation in order to have access to the city center and their jobs. Plan Ecuador recognized the need to bring resources and information to those living in Atucucho.

For the past 75 years, Plan International has built powerful relationships in 70 countries around the world. One of those countries is Ecuador, where they have eight offices across the four distinct regions, and their Country Office is located in Quito. To date, their results include 800,000 people benefitting from their resources, 10,990 youths participated in sexual education and awareness, constructed or rehabilitated 40 schools, and trained 2,046 people in livelihood skills (Plan International, 2016). Plan Ecuador is actively committed to empowering the vulnerable communities within Ecuador, who are facing gender stereotypes and exclusion.

According to Plan International (2015), exclusion is the process that prevents certain people or groups from fulfilling their rights. This process creates inequality in

people's access to and control over opportunities and resources. Furthermore, exclusion is not a linear process; rather it is a multi-dimensional process that involves multiple actors and institutions. In a developing country like Ecuador, women face a multitude of barriers such as economic, social, cultural and political rights. The consequences of exclusion include a lack of recognition and acceptance, poverty, lack of power and voice, economic vulnerability, and diminished life opportunities. The organization has made it their mission to challenge the social rules that Ecuadorian culture has instilled into society. They believe that exclusion is different and often worse for girls and women. Specifically, girls often face the strongest barriers to rights among excluded groups, which is why gender equality remains a distinct priority for the organization (Plan

Materials and Procedures

The approach Plan Ecuador has taken towards empowerment is to address the root-cause of exclusion, which includes a series of community assessments, comprehensive programs, advocacy campaigns, and inclusive workshops. The researcher was allowed access to Data and Results provided by Plan Ecuador staff, and observe a community diagnostic that took place in one of Quito's vulnerable communities. Ecuador, 2015, p. 3)

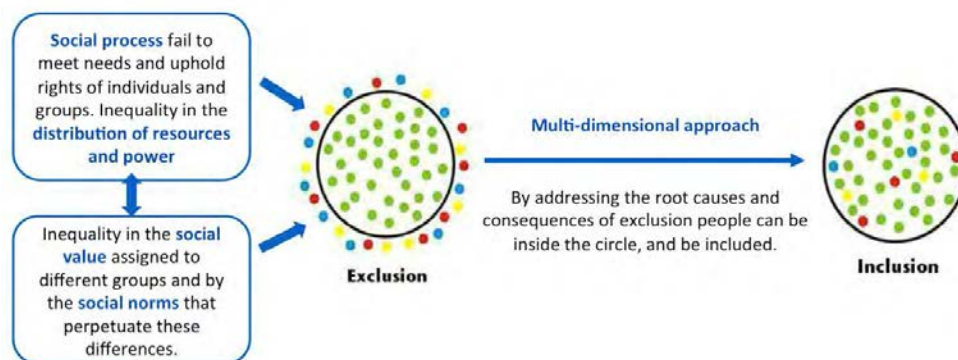


Fig 1: The connection between exclusion and inclusion. (Plan Ecuador, 2015, p. 4).

To ensure that all the Data and Results were equally evaluated, Plan follows specific Gender and Inclusion Standards. These Standards are used before, during, and after a program takes place. One of the standards is the Child Centered Community Development (CCCD), which works on the basis that communities are more powerful when they act together. The CCCD Standards on Tackling Gender Inequality and Exclusion, shown in Figure 2, provide practical guidance on what Plan staff can do to undertake the root causes of disempowerment, gender inequality, and promote sustainable empowerment.

Fig 2: CCCD Standard on Tackling Exclusion and Gender Inequality



(Plan International, 2015, p. 8).

The researcher used Plan's framework called 'The Gender Standards.' The Gender Standards developed as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assure that all programs are progressing in gender equality practices and procedures. Plan Ecuador implements these standards in all of their empowerment programs. Within the criteria,

there are examples of different types of good practices: tools, actions, conditions – stages, rules, policies, and procedures.

The Tool has three standards:

<u>STANDARD 1:</u> INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP	The managements assume institutional leadership of the implementation of the gender equality and their respective good practices
<u>STANDARD 2:</u> PLAN'S STRUCTURE, SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY	Gender equality is part of all the human management processes promoted by the People and Culture department throughout the organization
<u>STANDARDS 3:</u> PROGRAMS	Plan's programs bear the stamp of gender equality as a core component of the human rights approach.

Fig 3: Gender Standards Implementation Guide. (Plan International, 2014, p. 1).

The first meeting with the residents of Atucucho consisted of a community diagnostic, which provided Plan staff with enough information to create a program design. Additionally, this diagnostic educated those from the organization in understanding the current situation, the specific needs, and interests of the community. The meeting began with an explanation of tools and resources that Plan staff could provide to the community. Specifically, they provided courses on self-esteem, strengthening social skills, and increasing the active participation of women and young girls. During this time, Plan staff explained the importance of female leadership within

communities like Atuchuco. Although this program was geared towards female empowerment, it was important to discuss the inclusion of boys and men given that there were some men in attendance. Additionally, Plan discussed gender inequality with the community and suggested ways to confront injustices. Atuchuco residents live conservatively with little exposure to mainstream empowerment concepts, which is why these topics were explained in a respectful manner, sensitive to the local culture and their traditions.

The second half of the meeting involved all participants engaging in an ice-breaker activity, which was interactive and allowed everyone to introduce themselves in a nonthreatening way. Soon after, participants were asked to split into four different groups. It should be noted that each group had one male participant. After the groups were established, each group was given a large piece of paper and asked to draw or write down their community goals for the next five years. During this time, Plan staff was able to monitor and evaluate how the residents interacted and communicated with one another. Since this meeting was meant for females, it was especially important to observe the interaction between females and males. The staff was aware of Ecuador's machismo culture and unsure if the males in attendance were genuinely participating or there to scrutinize the actions of the women.

Upon completion of the five goals, each group selected a spokesperson to explain what they had come up with. Interestingly, every group chose to have a *spokeswoman* to address the audience. The goals of every group were similar. After addressing their goals for the future, Plan staff briefly explained the programs and trainings they could provide to the community. Finally, the residents were asked what date and time would work best

for future meetings. During this time the community voiced their concerns about their busy schedules and future scheduling conflicts, but after some discussion they were able to agree on a day and time that best suited everyone's needs.

The researcher assessed the data provided by Plan Ecuador staff to see if it followed the Inclusion (Figure 1), CCCD (Figure 2), and Gender Standards (Figure 3). Because all programs at Plan have to follow specific protocols, the researcher utilized the findings from the Atucucho community diagnostic, which include the design analysis, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and compare them to the Framework's provided on Gender and Inclusion.

Additional Analysis

For both case studies the researcher utilized the key questions guiding this research, which included:

- What has caused disempowerment in each case study?
- What are the culturally specific needs of the women in each case study?
- Are the organizations and its program(s) addressing the culturally specific needs of the women?
- What improvements are needed to achieve empowerment in each case study?

Incorporating the research questions produced results, challenges, and recommendations for future Nurturing Programme's and Community Diagnostics. The researcher included a comparison of Case Studies One and Two to provide the reader with an overview of the differences, similarities, and culturally specific approaches towards empowerment that each organization implements to their programs.

Ethical Considerations and Safeguards

During this analysis, the researcher adhered to specific guidelines that protected the participants and their identities. She kept her sentiments and feelings objective from the research to the best of her ability. Every participant was informed that notes and data were being collected. Participants were assured of anonymity and that the data used could not be traced back to individuals. The researcher kept the identities of participants confidential. It was explained that they could deny participation and could refuse to provide information. No harm was caused by participating in this research. Respect for each participant was maintained. Discrimination was avoided by the equal treatment of every participant.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Case Study One Data Evaluations

In this study, 12 participants filled out the WEMWBS at the beginning of the 11-week program, and 9 filled it out at the end. All scores increased from start to finish. Every participant felt that her overall mental wellbeing and morale had improved from the baseline to the follow-up, especially regarding improved self-esteem and positive self-talk. A majority of the women came into this program feeling extremely isolated from their peers and the community. Being that the majority are single mothers, there are few opportunities in which they were able to participate in social gatherings. This program gave the women an opportunity to socially engage with other mothers, who are similar in age to them. Overall, the women had mixed feelings at the end of the 11-weeks. Many expressed feeling a sense of achievement, and some mentioned feeling strange that they were no longer be attending Nurturing group on Tuesday mornings. The Parent Group Leaders explained that the journey did not have to end with the close of the program, but that they could continue their relationships and learning together. The Nurturing Programme was just a jumpstart to positive parenting, positive relationships, and positive self-love.

Additionally, facilitators discussed that on any journey one must know where they are starting from and where they want to get to, how to maintain the vehicle, to be aware of warning signs, and to know what to do in an emergency. Several of the women asked what to do if they slip back into their old ways. The Group Leaders explained that “slipping back” is normal and that it would be unreasonable to expect otherwise. With a bit of luck, if catch themselves slipping, they will be capable of replacing old habits with

new ones they learned from the Nurturing Programme. Everyone seemed to feel more at ease after addressing these concerns. At this time, the leaders gave each participant a handout named Emergency Survival Kit, which had two sections (1) My personal survival kit (2) My emergency parenting kit. The women were encouraged to fill in five tools in each section to support them when they are having a rough personal day or a difficult parenting day. The women came up with such tools as taking a time out, calling a friend or family member, going for a walk, listening to music, and writing down thoughts in a journal. The entire group showed improvements in patience, active listening, teamwork, communication, and confidence. The Nurturing Programme became a safe space for the women to develop not only parenting skills, but also interpersonal skills.

The interaction between the women was that of a family; they had all connected in a way that many did not think possible. This newly found comradery prompted the women to plan weekly group meetings of their own that focused on developing a variety of skills, to which Mornington staff happily provided resources. The researcher was able to participate in a few of these weekly meetings, which consisted of healthy cooking classes and crochet knitting classes. For the researcher, witnessing the development of the women's group outside of the Nurturing Programme was inspiring. Having met these women a few weeks earlier and seeing the progression of their relationship and interpersonal skills was absolutely empowering.

Case Study Two Data Evaluations

Plan Ecuador staff is committed to using these Frameworks and Standards while they identify and support vulnerable communities throughout Ecuador. Most recently, they identified the village of Atucucho as an area in which residents were facing a variety of barriers. This discovery led Plan staff to conduct a community diagnostic, which determined who, why, and what were the root causes of inequality and exclusion. At the first community meeting, there were 29 women and 4 males. Plan Ecuador recognized the inequalities often affecting women and girls, so the fact that there were more women than men in attendance was promising. However, it was important to be aware of the role that those four males played; they could have been there to either participate or to supervise the women. Having a predominately female group prompted Plan facilitators to take an in-depth look at the community dynamics and how power relations may be keeping certain residents from fully engaging in the group.

As the diagnostic carried on, both women and men residents began to actively participate and engage in the workshop. The first activity in the workshop was an ice-breaker, which consisted of musical chairs like exercise. Once seated, participants were encouraged to ask their neighbor (to the right) three questions about themselves and then share that information with the entire group. After this activity, all participants were asked to breakdown into four groups. The four groups were able to discuss and map their dreams for the future, what goals they hoped to achieve as a community, and how involved they wanted to begin the process. Many had dreams of acquiring a community truck or van so that they could transport their baked goods down to the city center and profit from their hard work in the bakery. Also, they would like to have access to

different forms of training, like self-esteem, sexual and reproductive health education. Some of the spokeswomen discussed their desire to have another community space that was separate from the childcare center, so that future trainings and meetings could be held. The enthusiasm displayed during this exercise was contagious. The village residents became inspired and energized about the thought of having trainings that could help them reach their goals.

The final part of the workshop was a breakdown of topics discussed and training's that would be on the agenda for the next year. Community residents began to express their doubts about having a yearlong time commitment. Many felt overwhelmed, especially because of their familial duties, long commutes to work, and lack of free time. At this point, the facilitators addressed their concerns and assured them that this process was dependent on what would benefit them. The following questions were asked: what days, time, and how often would community residents like for Plan facilitators to come out and train. After much discussion, the group was able to agree that Wednesday evenings would be the best time to meet. They also decided that it was necessary to skip the month of December. This discussion demonstrated that the community was able to work as a team and committed to improving themselves, one another, and the village. Also, it confirmed that Plan Ecuador's approach towards community development, empowerment, and inclusion was being properly executed.

During this community diagnostic, exclusion/inclusion framework was utilized by addressing the root causes of disempowerment within the community of Atuchuco. The CCCD Standards were followed by educating the community of their specific rights, working together in developing the best plan for Atucucho residents, supporting their

needs, and establishing a long-term commitment with the village. Additionally, Plan facilitators accurately implemented the Gender Standards by leading the group in an inclusive manner, assuring that all felt welcomed, promoting gender equality, and gently addressing gender-sensitive topics.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Discussion

This research intended to uncover and compare the culturally specific approaches that a developed country, like Northern Ireland and developing country like Ecuador had towards empowering women. A further look into two local organizations in the cities of Belfast and Quito provided the researcher with an in depth understanding of Northern Irish and Ecuadorian culture and customs. Both organizations delivered their message of empowerment through specific frameworks and standards. In Northern Ireland, Mornington Community Project, a grassroots community organization, provided participants with an 11-week Nurturing Programme that focused on holistic forms of empowerment. In Ecuador, Plan International (Ecuador) utilized a variety of methods towards empowering women. The researcher focused on a community diagnostics that took place in a small village. The researcher utilized observations from both organizations to provide an in-depth analysis of women's empowerment in Northern Ireland and Ecuador. The answers to the four questions guiding research are provided below:

What has caused disempowerment in each case study?

The first question that guided this research was to uncover what caused disempowerment in each community. In the case of Northern Ireland, it seems that years of conflict had left many people withdrawn, resentful, and disengaged. With the Peace Agreement signed in 1998, community dynamics were transitioning and readjusting to a new post-conflict society. Years of sectarian paramilitary violence left both men and women in a state of healing. Some men were imprisoned, others were struggling with

post trauma, and many were acting in an antisocial manner. During this period of post-conflict, women were left to fend for themselves and their families. With education and employment put on the backburner in favor of, raising children in a single parent homes, many women lost focus of their personal hopes and dreams. Like plants, humans will struggle in a difficult climate and thrive in a nurturing one (Hunt & Mountford, 2003).

By comparing the first and last session questionnaires, the researcher recognized that low morale and low self-esteem were the principal causes of disempowerment within the communities of South Belfast, Northern Ireland. Specifically, the researcher gathered the numerical data from the WEMWBS assessment.

Case Study Two faced many cultural challenges, for instance unequal power relations and gender inequality. The main challenge affecting a developing country like Ecuador is gaining access to resources that could improve the lives of many living in vulnerable communities. Those living in these areas have low capacity to engage with institutions that could advance women's roles and address a variety of concerns. For this specific case study disempowerment lies at the community level, where vulnerable communities are lacking access to resources.

What are the culturally specific needs of the women in each case study?

The culturally specific needs of the women in South Belfast consist of developing personal power, but through unassuming methods, such as parenting classes or in this case the Nurturing Programme. The dedication these women have to their children and their family is undeniable. The women who attended the Nurturing Programme were loving and selfless and for them, being a mother was the greatest gift they ever received, and they were determined to be the best parent possible. The Parent Group Leaders

facilitated and educated the participants to look deeper into their parenting styles, their attitudes, and behaviors. The ultimate goal was to encourage the women to envision and create their best life.

In Case Study Two, gaining access to resources is the culturally specific need of the women in Ecuador. Since many women live in rural communities throughout the country, they continue to be unaware of the various campaigns and advocacy programs that promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Providing resources to excluded and vulnerable communities encourages them to take control of their lives, resulting in the development of greater family relations and strengthening community dynamics.

Are the organizations and its program(s) addressing the culturally specific needs of the women?

Mornington Community Project believes that healthy ways of communicating, such as positive self-talk, not only improves the overall self-esteem of a woman but also encourages her children to communicate in the same manner. The Nurturing Programme provides the tools that encourage mothers to reflect on and explore new ideas of positive parenting. The organization is determined to improve the lives of Ormeau residents, which is why they established new programs. They are in tune with the community's needs.

For Case Study Two, the residents of Atucucho had an international non-profit organization, Plan Ecuador, actively committed to delivering resources and education to their village. Plan Ecuador's mission is to reach all women facing gender inequality and unequal access to resources. They are committed to influencing key decision-makers,

power holders, and human rights organizations to tackle exclusion and gender inequality through establishment of campaigns that focus on the education of all women and girls.

The organization is actively seeking those who are experiencing exclusion, disempowerment, and inequalities. They provide lessons and guidance to combat both the consequences of exclusion and disempowerment. Therefore, they are addressing the culturally specific needs of Ecuadorian women.

What improvements are needed to achieve empowerment in each case study?

Going forward, the researcher believes that Mornington Community Project could increase promotion for the Nurturing Programme. Reaching a wider audience could encourage more women to participate in the 11-week course. For example, they could promote upcoming programs and events on social media, send out a monthly newsletter, or host community meetings. In doing so, they could be more responsive and imaginative in their support to empower women. Reaching out to women in the community and inquiring about women's aspirations could broaden the approach they take towards empowerment. Being that Mornington is a smaller grassroots organization, their resources are limited, but their passion to empower the community of South Belfast could be the driving force in creating positive change. Additional suggestions include training, coordinating, and supporting volunteers, so more people can take part in community outreach. Community outreach could assist Mornington volunteers and staff in developing new relationships with other local organizations, thus, increasing resources and creating wider support networks.

Plan Ecuador is a much larger organization with a greater supply of resources. Their continued dedication to the vulnerable communities of Ecuador is undeniable. They

educate and empower communities that would otherwise not have access to such resources. One suggestion to improve Plan Ecuador's programs would be to encourage the women of the village to take a stronger role within community structures. Plan is currently providing education and resources, but upon the end of the program it would be beneficial to have a strong ambassador(s) within each vulnerable community established. Additionally, the inclusion of men and young boys could guide the community in overcoming traditional machismo attitudes and increase awareness of the important leadership roles women have within the community. Lastly, the researcher suggests that Plan create an exclusion analysis to inform strategic decisions about which groups and issues need extra attention. Creating a stronger analysis could strengthen the established empowerment and inclusion frameworks.

Analysis

The researcher experienced two countries that are in different stages of development. Specifically, Ecuador is a developing country, and the researcher worked with a well-established international non-profit organization with multiple resources and plenty of staff. Northern Ireland is a developed country, and the researcher partnered with a grassroots community organization that had limited resources and a handful of staff. Both organizations were determined to bring knowledge and resources to the people they served. However, the difference lies in how the organizations delivered their message to their perspective communities. Mornington provided a space for people to gather, and Plan Ecuador traveled to different communities and brought resources to the people. Both organizations actively investigate their target audience and educate themselves on the

best approach towards empowerment. Mornington Community Project committed itself to empowering women through positive parenting classes that ultimately influenced positive self-esteem, and Plan Ecuador was committed to creating an inclusive society that advocates for children and women's rights.

Limitations

The first limitation in this research is that the researcher focused her attention on two specific communities, in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Quito, Ecuador. In addition, the researcher limited herself to working with one organization in each country and did not seek further involvement with other non-profits. In Northern Ireland, the researcher was able to witness the pilot Nurturing Programme only, so there was not additional research to do a comparison. If the opportunity arose to participate in another Nurturing Programme, this would allow the researcher to assess the development and progression of the Programme. In regards to Ecuador, many of the same limitations were encountered. However, rather than participating in the pilot program, the researcher participated in a community diagnostic. Similarly, she was unable to see the entirety of the yearlong program in the village of Atucucho.

Another limitation involves the limited amount of participants in each study. Specifically, in South Belfast the researcher observed only those affiliated with Mornington Community. In Ecuador, she observed only those affiliated with Plan Ecuador, but mainly those living in Atucucho. This specific event welcomed 31 participants, a large amount for a small village, but there were many residents not in attendance. This limits the study from assessing the entire village of Atucucho. In

addition, the researcher's Spanish language skills are at an intermediate level, which created a slight barrier. Being unable to fluently understand the data could limit the outcome of the research.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Conclusions

Empowerment includes encouragement of specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which motivate self-participation and social change. Critical thinking allows individuals to reflect on their decision-making in personal, social, political and economic worlds and is transformative and empowering (Sleeter, 1991). Supporting women's empowerment is a long-term agenda that requires identifying and strengthening locally generated transformative processes. Effectively supporting women's empowerment requires well-grounded analysis, flexibility, imagination, investing in relationships, responsiveness, and modest in ambition.

Empowerment is a complex process and evolves differently in every culture. Local and international agencies working in development should consider culturally specific approaches towards women's empowerment. Before engaging at a community-level, each organization should understand their target audience. Having a balanced and detailed analysis of a specific community can increase the success rate of empowering women. Careful consideration of culturally specific needs should include detailed history and understanding of past and present circumstances. The comparison of Northern Ireland and Ecuador's approaches towards empowerment portrayed how different each country is, but also how similar they are. Both countries experienced a history of hyper masculinity or machismo within their culture and both have organizations are actively working towards empowering the women in their communities.

Northern Ireland takes a holistic approach towards empowerment by highlighting the importance of emotional well-being and self-esteem. Mornington facilitators used

WEMWBS to track the progress of each participant throughout the 11-week Nurturing Programme. During the first session, 12 participants were offered the WEMWBS form, and all of the participants completed it. This evaluation enabled group facilitators to track the emotional well-being of each participant in real-time. The results showed that the overall morale of the group was significantly low, especially for two of the participants. These participants scored themselves as not feeling optimistic, relaxed, interested, confident, or loved. It should be noted that one of these participants chose not to continue the programme, but the other successfully completed the 11-week course. The rest of the participants were equally consistent in their answers. They marked rarely or sometimes feeling optimistic, relaxed, interested, confident, or loved. Understanding the mental state of the participants, guided the facilitators in their overall approach towards the group. By understanding the morale of the group, they were able to ease into the concepts and ideas of the Nurturing Programme.

For the last meeting, there were 10 participants, rather than 12 because two people withdrew from the program. The responses captured on repeating WEMWBS showed some sections were more prone to change than others. Specifically, the second statement “I’ve been feeling useful” slightly increased, specifically those who previously marked *rarely*, now marked *sometimes* or *often*. Whereas the statement “I’ve been feeling loved” showed most variation, with scores jumping from *sometimes* to *often*. The statements that showed the most improvement were “I’ve been feeling good about myself” and “I’ve been feeling confident” because those who previously marked *none* or *rarely*, were now choosing *sometimes* and *often*. The most progress came from the participant mentioned above, who previously answered all questions *with none of the time* or *rarely*. She

showed improvement in 11 out of 14 questions. However, three of her answers stayed the same. Ultimately, the comparison from the first to the last session demonstrated an overall improvement in group morale. Figure 4 and Figure 5 summarize the changes from the first session to the last session.

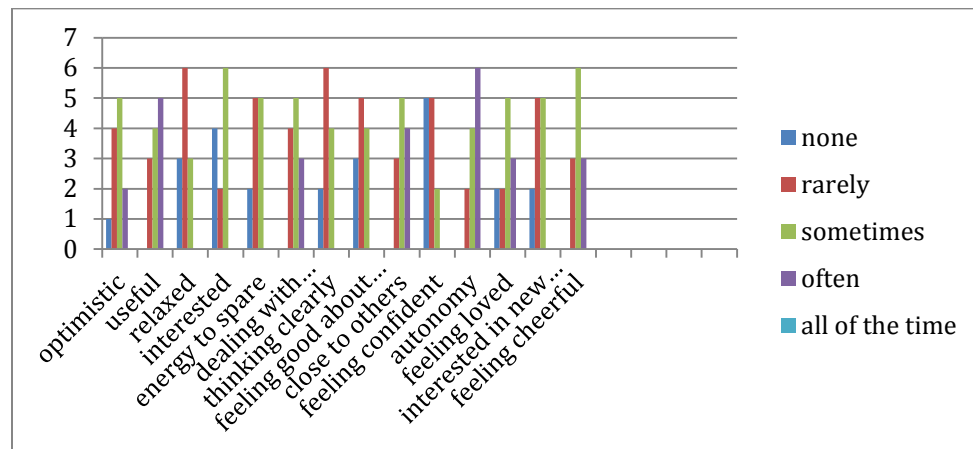


Figure 4. The scores on first session WEMWBS.

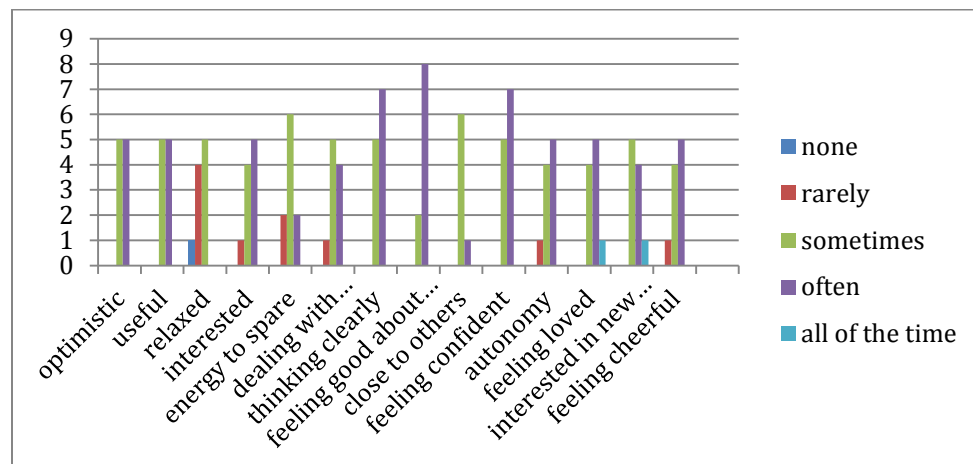


Figure 5. The scores on the last session WEMWBS.

These graphs demonstrate an overall improvement in the mental and emotional well-being of the participants. Although some participant's continue to struggle with self-esteem, the majority have shown significant progress. Through using WEBWBS, Mornington can actively monitor and track the progress of the participants and compare the outcomes of each group that completes the Nurturing Programme. Using

WEBWBS guides Mornington facilitators in identifying the particular problem that the women of South Belfast are encountering. From there, the organization can address and ultimately solve that issue. Although the data provided is limited, it does demonstrate that the Nurturing Programme had a positive impact on the women.

In the case of Ecuador, their main focus is inclusion and gender equality. Plan Ecuador follows strict guidelines and frameworks to ensure that all of their programs are meeting specific inclusion and gender standards. The organization utilizes specific assessment tools to document their progress within vulnerable communities, like Atucucho. After completing each community-based program, Plan Facilitators are asked to rank the progression by using an assessment tool (Figure 6). To assess *Good Practice* and *Implications for the fulfillment of each good practice*, facilitators score each section with numbers between one and five, one being the least amount of progress and five being the most. Once each section is scored, the sum of the numbers determines whether or not the program is meeting the organizational requirements.

Good Practice	Implications for the fulfillment of each good practice
All programmatic proposals promoted by Plan included in their entire programs and projects cycles, a gender analysis within the framework on rights and gender equality. Each program and project has a strategy for promoting gender equality.	In all phases of the cycle: design and analysis of the situation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the gender analysis tools are used and differential situations of girls and boys, their specific needs and strategic interests are recognized and power relations are identified.
In all the Plan interventions the monitoring and evaluation framework includes disaggregated data by sex and age and perform an analysis of the differences by gender.	Mechanisms for collecting and analyzing information to allow disaggregation of data by sex and age are established. It also promotes the inclusion of other data on any identified condition (ethnicity, class, disability status etc.).

The objectives and outcomes, benefits and opportunities generated by the interventions, consider the proportionality for women, girls, men and boys and includes measures to address gender inequality, gender-based violence and gender roles and stereotypes. Include specific outcomes to promote gender equality	All interventions defined objectives, outcomes and indicators that allow adequate monitoring, measurement and qualification of their contribution towards gender equality. Program criteria for the evaluation of gender (gender awareness and gender transformative) established in the Gender Equality Strategy Plan is used.
The participation and empowerment of girls, young girls and female adult is encouraged. Female leadership, are strengthened and projected and girls participate actively and on their own role in all Plan processes of intervention within the framework of equality and gender justice.	Girls are consulted and their views, needs and different interests are recognized. Participation is encouraged throughout the project cycle process to influence decision-making. The emphasis on girls is to equate them with boys who are already socially encouraged and empowered to manage the public world. This also applies to young girls and women who participate
In all Plan initiatives is an included component for the inclusion of plural or different identities, which insures everyone participates.	Girls and boys, men and women receive all necessary information, unprejudiced, enabling them to make better decisions for their lives. Plan will discuss gender inequality with communities and with children and will negotiate ways to confront injustice. This will be in a respectful manner with the local culture, without lead to conflicts or expose someone harm.
Plan expands partner relationships and alliances with government and social agencies to implement and strengthen gender equality. All covenants, contracts, agreements, and communications subscribe incorporate a paragraph that makes explicit the policy of gender equality Plan	Promoting partnerships, initiatives or bills, programs or public policies and specific agreements to promote gender equality in their entire joint or advocacy actions.
Percentage of Institutional Advancement Standard of Leadership by levels	
SUMMARY	
Levels	Percentage of Advancement
1. Minimum Good Practices required 80%:	0.00%
2. Advanced Good Practices 20%:	0.00%
Total Percentage advancement	0%

Figure 6: Gender Equality Standards Assessment.

Although the researcher was unable to see the year-long progression of the program in Atuchuco, she utilized this assessment tool to analyze the progress of the community diagnostic. In her opinion, Plan facilitators were engaging in *good practices* during their first session with the residents of Atucucho, which prompted her to give each section a score of five. However, the researcher had limited information on Plan's current

relationship with the government and social agencies, which made it difficult to answer number six. Based solely on the community diagnostic the score would be 80%, which classifies this community-based program as using *Advanced Good Practices*. The researcher understands her limitations in this assessment, but given the amount of time spent researching in Ecuador, she feels that this evaluation is a good representation of Plan Ecuador's approach towards women's empowerment. Ideally, the researcher would have a comparison from the community diagnostic (day one), the six month mark, and the final session. Having this comparison would give readers a balanced analysis of the empowerment group in Atuchuco. The analysis would provide possible improvements and suggestions that Plan could use towards their community based empowerment programs. However, with limited data and time spent with this community, the researcher does not feel equipped to give insight into improvements for Plan facilitators.

Every international agency, non-governmental, and a grassroots organization have different guidelines and frameworks to track their progress in empowering women. Some non-profits, like Mornington, are slowly implementing and developing evaluation tools, while others, like Plan Ecuador, have well-established frameworks and assessments. It is apparent that both organizations are working towards empowering the women in their respective communities. The complex diversity in each case study proves that culture and history play an important role in the process of empowerment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research and analysis of the Nurturing Programme and Plan Ecuador's empowerment programs would produce a detailed assessment of these programs. Specifically, tracking the progress of each program, over the span of a few years, could

determine whether each organization is providing the necessary tools to achieve empowerment. Additionally, the research could incorporate other organizations with a similar mission. Including multiple organizations in the same country could broaden the research and, would produce a more effective approach towards culturally specific empowerment programs.

At the community level, more efforts are needed to build women's capacity within the community structures (e.g. education, opportunities, and trade skills) so they are able to understand their rights and take an active role in creating change and strengthen their presence within Belfast and Quito. Additionally, both organizations should empower local women to take leadership roles within the organization or throughout the community. Another action moving forward would include the involvement of men and men's groups, which promotes equal partnerships with established women's groups. Having men involved could diminish traditional gender roles and help to overcome machismo behaviors within the community. Achieving complete equality and women's empowerment in these societies between both genders is necessary to eliminate all kinds of oppression, domination, and discrimination against women. Co-operation and active participation of men and women in all spheres of development can help achieve women's empowerment and gender equality.

In conclusion, Mornington Community Project and Plan Ecuador's approach in empowering women are very similar. Both organizations use the concept of empowerment thoughtfully and have an inclusive approach that encourages those who have experienced disempowerment. These organizations understand that the more people who can become empowered, the better off society will be.

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APPENDICES

(Appendix A)

PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS/CARERS

Thank you for taking part in this evaluation of Family Links Nurturing Programme. The aim of these questionnaires is to see whether the parenting groups which you are about to attend are helpful to parents and carers. In order to find out, we need many thousands of parents to complete the questionnaires before and after they have attended the 10 week parent group course. We will then be able to see what difference the groups have made to the people who have come along to them.

The questionnaires will remain anonymous and we do not need your name or address. The only ID needed is so that your Parent Group Leader can match the questionnaire you complete before doing the group with the one you complete afterwards. Probably the use of your first name and date of birth, and those of your children, will be enough to enable this matching up to take place.

There are two parts to this questionnaire pack:

1. The first part asks you to complete the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to find out how you the parent or carer are feeling.
2. It then asks you to do a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for each of your children who are aged between 3 and 16. You may also be asked to invite any children you have between the ages of 11 and 16 to complete a slightly different version of the questionnaire themselves.

Please complete the questionnaires and return them to your Parent Group leader before you complete the parent course.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to take part.

Hunt & Mountford, (2003).

(Appendix B)

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've had energy to spare	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling confident	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling loved	1	2	3	4	5
I've been interested in new things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling cheerful	1	2	3	4	5

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)
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(Appendix C)

First Session Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

3/4

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name

Male/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries, often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other children or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often argumentative with adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can stop and think things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can be spiteful to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets on better with adults than with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature

Date

Parent/Teacher/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help